



Obesity: a growing danger

www.worldheart.org

OBEESITY

Overweight and obesity – a new epidemic

- Globally, over 1.5 billion adults are overweight; 500 million of them are obese.
- Nearly 43 million children under the age of five were overweight in 2010.
- Around the world, obesity has more than doubled since 1980.
- Worldwide, overweight and obesity are linked to more deaths than underweight.

Overweight and obesity are serious threats to health

- Overweight and obesity increase the risk of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and cancer.
- Almost 3 million deaths a year are attributed to overweight/obesity.
- Overweight and obesity is the fifth highest risk factor for death, ahead of alcohol, unsafe sex, or poor sanitation and water supply.
- Obese children are more often ill or disabled in adulthood and are likely to die earlier than those of normal weight.

Overweight and obesity are growing health problems for the poor

- In the past two decades, obesity rates have tripled in developing countries.
- In 2010, in South Africa, more than two thirds of women were overweight or obese.

- More than four in ten people in Colombia and more than a third of the Brazilian population are classed as overweight.

Overweight and obesity can be prevented. We must take action now to:

- Support policies that improve the availability and affordability of fruit and vegetables
<http://www.consumersinternational.org>
- Strengthen infrastructure for cycling and walking through town planning and transport policies.
- Strengthen policies for physical education and healthy eating in schools.
- Limit and restrict marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages.
- Advocate for strengthened commitment to counteracting obesity:
 - European Charter on counteracting obesity.
<http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/diseases-and-conditions/obesity/publications/pre-2009/european-charter-on-counteracting-obesity>
 - UK government's Obesity Toolkit.
<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=7096334>
- Find out about risk factors in your country.
<https://apps.who.int/infobase/index.aspx>
http://gamapserver.who.int/gho/interactive_charts/ncd/mortality/cvd/atlas.html



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Why is obesity a problem?

Overweight and obesity predispose people to non-communicable diseases (NCDs) including heart disease, stroke, diabetes and some forms of cancer. NCDs kill more people than all other causes combined. These diseases cause enormous human loss and impose heavy costs on health systems. They also reduce overall productivity by killing and disabling people in their productive years.

What is obesity?

Obesity has been in the international classification of diseases for over a century. BMI {weight (kg)/ height² (m)} is a simple and very usable measure to estimate prevalence. A BMI level of 25 or more is classified as overweight and 30 or more is classified as obese. Overweight and obesity occur when more energy (measured in calories) is consumed than is spent through exercise. Diets which are high in fat and sugar are "energy-dense", meaning that they have many calories. Energy-dense diets contribute to obesity and overweight.

Why is it increasing?

Rapid urbanisation, globalisation, changes in transport and food production and other economic and social developments have altered the way people live and eat in most parts of the world. More people are employed in sedentary work, and more use motorised transport instead of walking or biking. For many, traditional diets are being replaced by processed fast foods. In more and more countries, fat and sugar have become the cheapest way to get calories, cheaper than staples like grains, beans, lentils or fruits and vegetables. These factors encourage a higher intake of calories while decreasing the energy (calories) spent through physical activity.

Who is most affected?

While it can affect people from all levels of society, in the past few decades obesity has become a condition that affects the poor more than other groups. In high-

income countries it is most common in underprivileged populations. In low- and middle-income countries, rates of obesity and the non-communicable diseases it causes are rising fast. With less access to health services that prevent or treat non-communicable diseases, and often without insurance or social protection that can help compensate for loss of income from the death or disability of breadwinners, the poor are hit hardest by the health effects of overweight and obesity. Low-income economies are also the most vulnerable to the loss of productivity caused by early death and disability.

What can be done?

Healthy diet and physical activity can largely prevent obesity and overweight. Governments, international partners, civil society, NGOs, the private sector and communities have vital roles to play in changing the policies and practices that shape behaviour around diet and physical activity. These include the trade, agriculture, transport and other urban planning policies that determine whether people have healthy options, as well as investment in education, media and marketing that influence people's choices. Insisting that health impact be a priority for policy in these different areas (e.g. agriculture, transport, urban planning, environment, food processing, distribution, marketing and education, and health) can help reduce obesity and overweight.

For detailed references visit <http://www.worldheart.org/children>

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